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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2260
INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8767
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9417
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1331
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7618
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 006368

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: "STOLEN FILMS" ALLEGEDLY AT ROOT OF DISPUTE WITH
BANGLADESHI JOURNALIST

REF: A. DHAKA 06225

[B](#). DHAKA 06257

[C](#). DHAKA 06261

[D](#). DHAKA 06263

[E](#). DHAKA 06305

[1](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: The October 5 incident involving journalist Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury took a new turn with the revelation that the person he accused of attacking him, Hussain Khan Helal, is a U.S. citizen. POLOFF met with Helal when he came to the Embassy's Consular Section to complain about his dispute with Choudhury. Meanwhile, the Additional Commissioner of Police met individually with Choudhury and Helal in an effort to resolve the dispute. END SUMMARY.

"I am the U.S. citizen here"

[2](#). (SBU) Helal appeared at the American Citizens Services window of the Embassy's Consular Section on October 18 to lodge a complaint against Choudhury. After registering him, ACS referred him to POLOFF. Helal began his meeting with POLOFF by saying "I am the American citizen here. Why is the Embassy helping Shoaib Choudhury?" Helal, a Bengali film actor who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1987, claimed the incident on October 5 was not a hate crime or human rights violation, but an issue of stolen property. He appeared eager to tell his side of the story and asked POLOFF to report his comments to the State Department.

Dispute over "stolen films"

[3](#). (SBU) Helal said Choudhury took over CMV, a Dhaka-based audio-visual production company, in early September but did not pay for it. Helal, who founded CMV but was no longer its owner, was leasing two rooms from CMV for his own company, HUSSK Productions. Helal claimed Choudhury removed 40 reels of film prints from Helal's offices, valued at 6 million taka (approximately \$96,000), to Choudhury's private residence. According to Helal, he and Choudhury met at the CMV offices to try to resolve the dispute on October 5. Helal admits their respective supporters began "shoving and pushing" but reported "no blood was spilled" and no one was injured. Eventually, Helal said, Choudhury left. Police from Shahbagh Police Station showed up a bit later, followed by Choudhury. Helal said Choudhury agreed to return the films to Helal, left the premises, and did not return.

[4](#). (SBU) Helal said the missing films were his primary concern. The dispute over ownership of CMV was a matter for the courts to sort out. He said Choudhury and the owners, distant relatives of Helal's based in London, had started

quarrelling in early September over CMV, and the fighting finally resulted in mutual restraining orders and charges being filed at the end of September. Helal shared documentation which he said proved his ownership of HUSSK as well as police charge sheets which he filed regarding the missing films. (NOTE: Home Minister Lutfozzaman Babar also provided copies of various filings and counter-filings to Charge and POLOFF on October 12. Films were mentioned in both filings.)

¶15. (SBU) According to Helal, when he contacted Home Minister Babar, Babar told him he couldn't help "because the U.S. Embassy has asked me to help Shoaib." He suggested Helal contact the Embassy and "try explaining the situation to the Ambassador." POLOFF told Helal the Embassy was concerned about Choudhury's personal safety and right to due process.

¶16. (SBU) Helal said it was his own safety, not Choudhury's, which was at risk, noting he had received threatening phone calls from Choudhury's supporters warning him "you will be killed if you don't drop the charges against Shoaib." Citing Choudhury appeals to Congress, Helal said he would contact his congressman, Representative Crowley of New York, when Helal returns to the U.S. on October 20.

Recent Developments

¶17. (SBU) Choudhury called POLOFF later on October 18 to report he had been summoned to the Additional Police Commissioner's office to discuss the October 5 incident. He said the Commissioner met with him first, and then later with Helal, and was preparing a report for the Home Minister on the case. Although he was aware that Helal's family lived in

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the U.S., Choudhury said he did not know that Helal was a U.S. citizen. Helal also confirmed that he was summoned by the Commissioner after his meeting at the Embassy.

Comment

¶18. (SBU) We will continue to remain in close contact with Choudhury on all of his cases, and in particular his sedition trial (ref E), which is not scheduled to resume until November 13.
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